

Ofsted withdraws 'discriminatory' guidance on inspecting faith schools

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Ofsted has told the National Secular Society that it is updating its guidance on inspecting 'faith schools' following criticism that it endorsed gender segregation in lessons.

Last week the NSS accused Ofsted of "capitulating to oppressive religious demands" and [called on the schools watchdog to review the guidance](#).

The [briefing note for inspectors on inspecting 'faith schools'](#), updated just three months ago, advised inspectors that in Muslim faith schools gender segregation "should not be taken as a sign of inequality between different genders."

Inspectors were also advised that art and music lessons in Muslim schools can be "restricted", that health and sex education will be taught within Islamic studies and that daily prayers will often "dictate the shape of the school day".

As pointed out to Ofsted by the NSS, the guidance appeared to contradict Department for Education policy, which has made clear that segregation in the classroom should not be tolerated.

In correspondence to the NSS, Ofsted said the briefing note was "currently being updated and should be published shortly once it has been amended."

The National Secular Society welcomed Ofsted's review.

Stephen Evans, NSS campaigns manager, said: "Ofsted inspectors should not be accommodating unreasonable religious demands from groups involved in running faith schools. Doing so normalises practices inconsistent with core values such as gender equality and individual liberty. Ofsted should be ensuring these values are upheld in schools, not facilitating their erosion.

"We also hope the revised guidance will make no allowance for publicly funded religious schools to dilute the National Curriculum and sex and relationships education in order to accommodate religious dogma. To do so would be a betrayal of children's rights."

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